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ABSTRACT

The field of education has recognized that intensive clinical experience constitutes an ideal learning model. Fellowships in education were accompanied by large amounts of money in demonstration projects. Two costly national programs designed to move highly qualified persons into top administrative positions fell short of their goal. Internship/fellowship programs have developed at secondary and college levels and in many fields. Two questions that should be considered are: who should design and coordinate fellowships, and what can be done to "defend" the public from substantial input to the decision-making process by unofficial interns and fellows? A benefit of the fellowship experience is that it provides exposure and visibility that would take longer to achieve in the conventional classroom setting. Fellows gain a perspective of what top leaders of institutions are like and what they do. At the present time, fellows are usually granted to the graduate or, in a few cases, to mid-career individuals. Fellows usually see themselves as initiators of plans and find most of their satisfaction in their own achievements. Personal attributes characteristic of fellows are discussed. A social change dimension of fellowships is that they provide special access to a large proportion of minorities and women, which helps dismiss myths about the general suitability of persons and groups previously excluded. (SW)

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# FELLOWSHIPS: ONE BRIDGE BETWEEN THE ACADEMY AND REALITY

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FELLOWSHIPS AS ONE BRIDGE BETWEEN THE ACADEMY AND REALITY:

Over the past thirty years, education has discovered a truth long since known in the field of medicine, that intensive clinical experiences constitute an ideal learning model to hone the skills of a craftsman and make of him a more reliable practitioner. Even though Kurt Levin has noted "that there is nothing more practical than a good theory" in a field of applied science such as medicine or even education, there is nothing more unreliable and hazardous to the health of the subject than a practitioner who has never learned the trade under the watchful eye of a mentor.

In typical American excess, the arrival of fellowshipping on the educational scene was greeted by large gobs of money in demonstration projects -- thus was born the Education Professions Development Act which was a Career Ed or CETA program in professional clothing. Foundations, too, joined the rush to welcome the new fad in town and funded five or more very visible national programs. Welfare for the advantaged is what some of these programs should have been called -- two national programs cost an average of 60 and 80 K respectively per Fellow served. Both of these programs were designed to move highly qualified persons into top administrative positions,

but fell far short of their goal. One of the programs produced less than 3% of the level of administrator that it had targeted -- which translates to a cost per success of 2.5 million dollars. The recession of the early seventies provided respectable and decent cover for "escape" from the debacle.

But in a tribute to the elasticity and flexibility of the American educational psyche it did not reject the idea; rather it looked upon the problem the way Henry Ford must have when he vowed to mass produce the Model T. Thus has blossomed a myriad of internship/fellowship programs focusing on high school students, college students, graduate students, women, minorities, superintendent trainees, transportation experts, policy makers -- for every population or occupation imaginable. Some are still a bit "fat," most are lean; a few make the participants lean, but have a well concealed but significant profit for the coordinators.

Even though the current student population appears depressingly conservative and grade oriented, we should not lose sight of the fact that these conservatives are likely to push the schools and curriculum inexorably toward practicality and reality -- though the two are not really identical. Students will be attracted with their equivalent of vouchers -- the Basic Opportunity Grants and other forms of student aid -- to seek out programs that provide them with the tools to succeed in the system. Fellowships answer rather decisively the nagging question, "Yes, but what experience

do you have?" Fellowships provide relatively low risk -- and a lot of attraction -- for sponsors to provide the experiences that concretize/reify learning with outstanding Fellows -- thus meeting the immediate needs of both.

Fellowships as a social bridge appeal to a select population at the present time -- those characteristics later -- but this may pass as institutions compete for clients and students seek education that is grounded in reality. The pitfall ahead, however, is momentous: consider the ennui that envelopes most of higher education -- mass boredom and ritualism abounds, going through the steps in the continuing saga of "making the grade" as Becker and Geer put it a few years back.

Those interested in creation of new institutional forms and who wish to set a proper course for the emerging use of fellowships need to ask some questions about the best use of this form of experiential learning.

STRUCTURALLY:

1. Who should design and coordinate the fellowships? Should universities, with all of their conservative tendencies and vested interests in creating credit hours take the lead?

2. What can be done to "defend" the public from a floating crap game in which many unofficial individuals have sometimes substantial input to the decision making process? Recently,

several interns made an impact on federal government education policy statements that exceeded the sum total impact of all state Commissioners. Not only are interns and Fellows not elected to a place of public trust and authority, they, by definition, have not even been approved through an employment process that legitimates credentials.

SOCIAL ROLE BENEFITS:

1. Experience and maturation in a fellowship are remarkably efficient and rapid. One year in a fellowship setting that provides good exposure and visibility has often been equated to three to four years of other learning modes such as conventional education in classrooms. The flip side of this issue must, however, be considered: what would happen to the conventional 12-year education if it were to be repackaged at several points with fellowships of varying lengths depending on the age of the participant?

2. Another benefit or perhaps detriment to the fellowshipping business is the rapid demythologizing that occurs: Fellows see that top leaders of the institutions can sometimes look very silly indeed, ask absurd questions, have blind spots, etc. (Hopefully, none of this during press conferences.) But, the fellowship opportunity allows, and sometimes forces, them to conclude that they too could perform that task, and soon, not years later. Fellowships inculcate hubris, arrogance,

cockiness, and a flattening of society. Could the Power Elite be conceived of in a fellowshipping society? Not only do the fellowships attract upwardly mobile persons but these same persons might be moved onto an even faster track with access, contacts, knowledge that could wreak havoc with sociologists' social-class predictors. How much fluidity is too much? What of the disillusionment that might occur if society refuses to be as open as is needed to integrate large cadres of informed young leaders?

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE:

1. Fellows not only are behaviorally pragmatic, they are intellectually pragmatic. At the present time, fellowships are grafted on to the educational experience as sort of a career rite-of-passage for the graduate or, in some few cases, for mid-career individuals. All the hurdles must be cleared before one is allowed the dilettantism of fellowshipping for a while. If, however, the idea catches on and mushrooms, all of that might change. Colleges might grant credit -- for tuition of course -- for four years of fellowships in varied settings. Then, the ultimate will have been accomplished -- conventional wisdom will reign. Fellows, all the rhetoric notwithstanding, are a notoriously a-literate lot. Reading seldom and superficially, most take little stock in theories; they learn, they like to say, "by doing" and talking through topics. Well, so does the

carpenter, but is that the sort of craftsman who should be making decisions of government? While Harvard grapples with a 1978 definition of the educated gentleperson, a widespread growth of fellowships could raise conventional wisdom to a religion.

2. One of the most intriguing social change dimensions of fellowships as they have been used thus far is in relation to special access provided to a large proportion of minorities and women. Not only does the fellowship literally open the organizational door -- at least for a time -- but it helps the establishment explode myths about reliability, dependability, and general suitability of persons and groups previously excluded.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FELLOWS:

The term used to be "change agent", "leader" has always been a general appellation, but Fellows are apt to feel that it applies to them in a very special way. Mid-career individuals in existing programs receive considerable reinforcement through the selection process that defines them as special as leaders. It's not hard for a Fellow to develop a "Lone Ranger" mentality; Fellows regularly see themselves as architects and initiators of plans and programs rather than maintainers. Is this an accurate or a self-serving perspective? Research with Fellows

also indicates that they find most of their satisfaction in their own achievements, and in sticking with a problem until it is solved. Fellows also draw heavily from populations that are highly verbal, mobile, skilled in interpersonal contacts and "taking charge." A high proportion are extroverted and see themselves as politically liberal. They also seem to experience a higher than average frequency of divorces, and life changes. They are more frequently extrapunitive, as well, and tend to derogate high status in others in the sense of not being impressed with titles or rank.

CONCLUSION:

The above dimensions of fellowships are offered with the recognition that they fall somewhere between the polar types of reality/categories and hypotheses/fantasies. The analysis intends to illustrate some of the concerns that educators (especially of the lifelong variety) should attend to in a period of American educational history that may retrospectively be classified as the end of the testing of fellowships and the advent of rapid growth. What can be done to forestall the pitfall of mass-producing fellows in much the same way as schools have mass-produced historians, Anthropoligists and (Lord knows) Sociologists?